

#### 4VAC15-90-90

#### Game: Deer: Bag limit, bonus deer permits and special antlerless provision for youth hunters.

##### Summary:

The proposal is to (i) establish an unlimited daily bag limit for deer in all the cities and towns in Virginia that allow deer hunting (except in the cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach), (ii) create a uniform statewide deer bag limit of one deer per day on national forest, department-owned, and department-managed lands, and (iii) clarify that national forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson are included under the west of the Blue Ridge Mountains bag limit.

##### Proposed language of amendment:

#### 4VAC15-90-90. Bag limit, bonus deer permits and special antlerless provision for youth hunters.

A. The bag limit for deer east of the Blue Ridge Mountains (except on national forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson Counties) is two per day, six per license year, three of which must be antlerless unless otherwise noted in this subsection.

1. The daily bag limit for deer is unlimited in the Counties (including the cities and towns within) of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William and in all the cities and towns that allow deer hunting (except in the cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach).

2. Only one deer per day may be taken on national forest, lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson Counties department-owned, and department-managed lands.

3. Only one elk per day may be taken ~~east of the Blue Ridge Mountains.~~

B. The bag limit for deer west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and on national forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson is two per day, five per license year, three of which must be antlerless unless otherwise noted in this subsection.

1. The daily bag limit for deer is unlimited in all the cities and towns that allow deer hunting.

2. Only one deer per day may be taken on national forest, department-owned, and department-managed lands ~~west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.~~

3. If a deer hunter kills two antlered bucks in a license year in Alleghany, Augusta, Bath, Highland, or Rockbridge County, at least one of the antlered bucks must have at least four antler points, one inch or longer, on one side of the antlers. This subdivision shall not apply to any county designated by the department within 25 miles of a confirmed detection of Chronic Wasting Disease.

34. Only one elk per day may be taken ~~west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.~~

C. Except as noted in subsection E of this section, antlerless deer may be taken only during designated either-sex deer hunting days during the special archery seasons, special muzzleloading seasons, and the general firearms season.

D. Bonus deer permits shall be valid on private land in counties and cities where deer hunting is permitted (except Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise Counties) during the special archery seasons, special muzzleloading seasons, and the general firearms season. Bonus deer permits shall be valid on public

lands, including state parks, state forests, national wildlife refuges, military areas, etc., as authorized by the managing agency. Unless otherwise posted or authorized in writing for wildlife management areas by the department, or for national forest lands by the U.S. Forest Service, the use of bonus permits is prohibited on department-owned and national forest lands. Bonus deer permits shall be valid for antlerless deer only. Deer taken on bonus permits shall count against the daily bag limit but are in addition to the seasonal bag limit.

E. Deer hunters 15 years of age and younger, including those exempt from purchasing a hunting license and holders of an apprentice hunting license, when in compliance with all applicable laws and license requirements, may take one antlerless deer per license year on days other than designated either-sex deer hunting days during the special muzzleloading seasons or the general firearms season in all counties.

**Rationale:**

Unlimited daily bag limit in cities and towns. Over the past twenty plus years, the Department's deer management staff has taken a proactive and aggressive approach to urban deer management in cities and towns across Virginia. Examples include the establishment of an early and late urban archery deer season(s) which extends deer season to eight months each year and is open to participation for all cities and town in Virginia (except Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach). Forty-seven cities and towns are currently participating. Additionally, the Department has adopted regulations that make the muzzleloading and firearms seasons full season either-sex deer hunting in all cities and towns that allow deer hunting (except Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach). Simply put all cities and towns in Virginia (except the cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach) currently have access to an eight month long deer season in which every deer hunting day is an either-sex deer hunting day. The only regulation currently limiting antlerless deer harvest in these areas is the current two deer per day daily bag limit. Staff recommends that the daily deer bag limit be made unlimited in all cities and towns in Virginia (except Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach).

Public land daily and season antlerless deer bag limits. The Department has documented a significant decline (~60%) in the deer kill on public lands west of the Blue Ridge and east of the Blue Ridge in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson counties (e.g., National Forest and Department-owned lands)) over the past twenty plus years. To address this decline, the Department has significantly reduced public land either-sex deer hunting opportunities over the last decade or more.

During the last regulation cycle, a uniform statewide private land daily deer bag limit of two deer per day was established. At the same time, a bag limit of one deer per day was adopted for public lands west of the Blue Ridge and national forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson.

The deer management staff recommends that a bag limit of one deer per day on public lands should be extended statewide to continue protecting the deer resource from overharvest while at the same time more equitably distributing the available public land deer resource between individual deer hunters and user groups.

National Forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson counties. The inserted text corrects an omission in the current bag limit regulation. National forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson are exempt from the East of the Blue Ridge Mountains bag limit and should have been added to the West of the Blue Ridge Mountains bag limit to maintain a consistent bag limit on all National Forest lands in Virginia.